

If Pinocchio reviewed Amiga games

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

If you've ever read a tawdry, sycophantic review of a dire Amiga game in a magazine and wondered if the critics had been licking psychoactive, poisonous toads, this one's for you.

AUI Entertainment Now

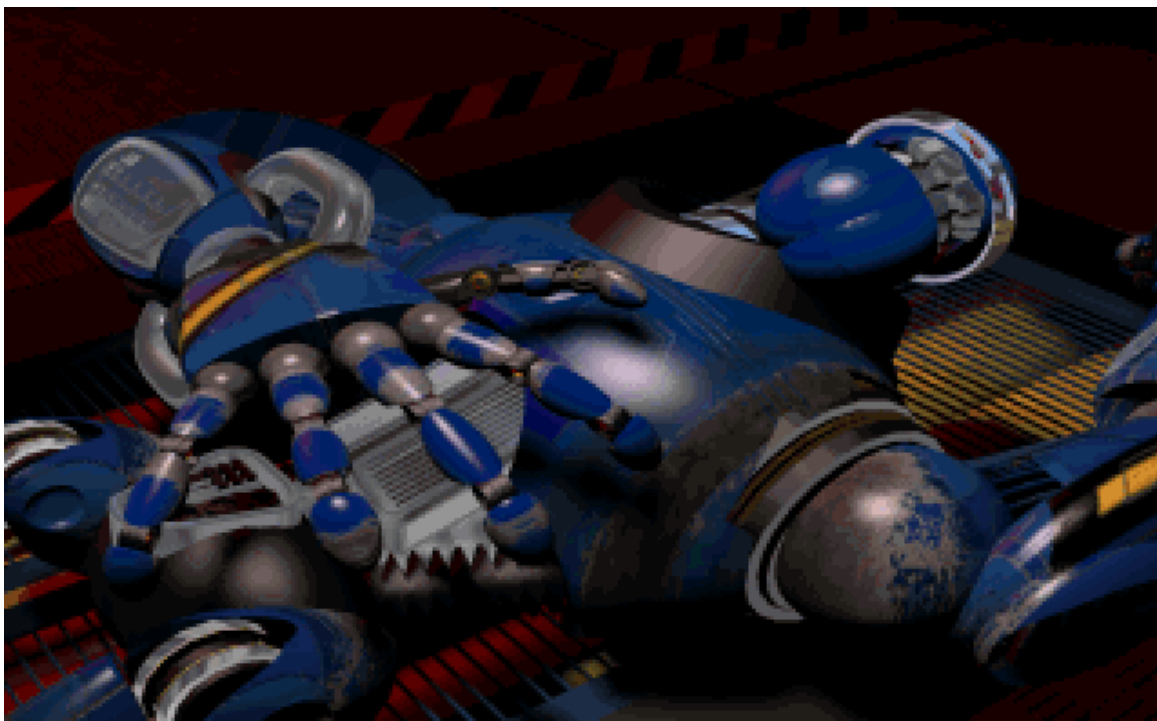
Rise of the Robots

Well, it's arrived at last. Accompanied with an impressive TV campaign. And some powerful backing. The real pleasure about this game is that it is an attempt to push forward the way games are conceived. On the CD32 the game starts with a rendered intro, which we've seen before. However, when you enter the game itself, you note immediately that it's a beat 'em up with a lot of wrapping. But what wrapping. It's time to face facts that most games are only rehashes of others, although you do start to wish that games companies would make some effort and at least change the engine.



Rendered to perfection? Cinematic, but lacking depth.

There are very few types of game. All you can say is whether the game is well crafted or not. Rise of the Robots, in case you've been away for a year, is a beat 'em up played out with rendered graphics. Everyone moves with grace and beauty. After you beat your way through the opponents, a cinographic sequence moves you on. Why is this so good? Well, I admit that we've seen it before, but this time it's actually done well. The problem is that while Rise takes a step towards the interactive movie with one foot, it takes a step back with the other. There can be no pretence made. This game surrounds you hitting your opponent. Couldn't something more have been done? I've got no answers as to what, but I didn't design the game. Still, with Mortal Kombat II storming the charts, beat 'em ups are popular and this is a good one.



It's still a beat 'em up.

Verdict: graphics - 96% | sound - 80% | gameplay - 80% |
overall - 90%

**I didn't think Google Translate was around back in 1995,
yet this prose would suggest otherwise.**

We'd all like to believe that the writers of our favourite Amiga magazines had the ideals of incorruptible candour and journalistic integrity at the forefront of their minds when deliberating over the pros and cons of the latest releases, though regrettably, this wasn't always the case.

The disconnect stems from the unfortunate situation whereby the magazines disseminating their sagely judgement to the game-buying fraternity are the very same organisations selling advertising space to the publishers of the games submitted for assessment. This symbiotic relationship was, of course, a colossal source of revenue for gaming magazines - their lifeblood even - so it wouldn't have been prudent to go upsetting the 'sponsors' by lambasting their products, even if it was entirely warranted.

It was an indigenous disease that infected publications from the top down. An individual critic may have been the epitome of sainthood, yet be coerced to toe the line by the publisher of the magazine he or she answered to. We all have bills to pay and squirrels to nourish after all.

Acutely cognisant of the power they wielded, some unscrupulous publishers would use this to their advantage by promising early preview copies of games, or other tempting kickbacks, to magazines in return for favourable reviews. Naturally, the magazines were tripping over themselves to be first in line for a scoop (or exclusive cover disk demo), and the disreputable ones often succumbed to the pressure to remain relevant in the milieu of fierce competition.

For the vast majority of magazines, the upshot of outside influence was the establishment of a policy whereby no game would be graded lower than 70% or so. In this Ministry of Truth parallel universe, there *were* no awful games because they'd been outlawed.

One shortcut that would elevate their chances of being first across the finish line was to review incomplete games, and fill in any gaps in code or knowledge with marketing spiel relayed by the publishers. On some occasions, this even led to the ridiculous scenario whereby reviews of games appeared in magazines that would *never* be finalised and released for sale.

The perfect example is MicroProse's 1994 Pizza Tycoon sim. This was originally intended to appear on both the PC and Amiga platforms, though due to teething problems which transpired in the game only being able to run from a hard drive installation, the Amiga version was shelved indefinitely. Serendipitously - so Amiga Action thought - they had the PC edition to hand so could swiftly cobble together a convincing review from dabbling with that and declare it an assessment of the forthcoming Amiga port. Egg and faces aren't typical ingredients in pizza recipes, yet somehow they featured prominently in *this* equation!



Amiga Action weren't the only magazine guilty of this, just the most light and frothy, so destiny bound to carry the mantle of disingenuity for their shady accomplices. At best it was little more than a comic book, festooned with regurgitated press releases.

Nevertheless, magazines of their ilk were fooling no-one with their shillery, and would often hang themselves by committing to print details of games that clearly reflected they hadn't played the genuine article.

Shadow of the Beast II is a prime case in point; the manual states that you can enter shops to buy power-ups in exchange for the coins you collect along your voyage. This concept was never implemented in the final release, yet was reported by some magazines as though it had been. Open mouth, insert foot!

One Italian magazine that shall remain nameless gave Body Blows a premature, glowing review based solely on the appraisal of a few Deluxe Paint work-in-progress images (complete with mouse cursor 'cross-hair'). They were caught red-handed, however, when they declared its ultimate nemesis, Max, to be

merely an "ordinary fighter". It had clearly escaped the critic's attention that Max is, in fact, a cyborg; a cunning twist revealed upon defeating his human facade. Perhaps the concept of his incognito true self hadn't even been hatched on paper at this stage.

B-b-b-b-baby, you ain't seen nothing yet! Amiga Joker reviewed Software 2000's adventure game, Jonathan, in April 1991, awarding it a commendable score of 90%, despite it not being released for another two years! When it eventually surfaced, a different critic from the same magazine took a fresh look and pegged it at 88% as if to corroborate his colleague's visionary judgement.

The name alone should give you a clue; Amiga Joker are considered the German equivalent of Amiga Action in terms of reputable reporting.



Keep in mind that these were supposedly all independent magazines, not official Commodore mouthpieces, the equivalent of which you find in the console world to this day. Commodore didn't develop games for the Amiga so there *was* no official magazine to serve as a thinly shrouded catalogue for their wares.

Reviewing unfinished copies of games became almost ubiquitous in the Amiga realm, so much so that Amiga Power felt the need to declare themselves the antidote to the underhand practice. While they made it their policy only to assess finished code, they did, in fact, slip up by reviewing three such games themselves. That said, they retained a cherished reputation for being the one magazine you could rely on for honest opinions, even if that meant landing themselves in the dog house with certain publishers.

The parable of Team 17 vs Amiga Power is now legendary in the Amiga community. The magazine generally awarded respectable grades to Team 17 games (an average of 88% to be precise), though when they took a disliking to ATR and Kingpin, the developer-publisher threw a wobbler and refused to send them any more review copies, forcing Amiga Power to buy their own from their local retailer when they became available to the public. Team 17 went so far as to mount a libel case against Amiga Power, which was promptly thrown out largely because it was absurd, and easily disrobed as such.



While some magazines *cough* Amiga User International *cough* brazenly plagiarised the competition (refer to the Andy Moss vs Amiga Power case, which AP won without breaking into a sweat), others were guilty of lavishing deeply flawed games with rapturous plaudits, relegating their reviews to little more than glossy brochures.

The key to spotting these is to look for outliers in the scores, often coupled with a review published a month or two earlier than anyone else's. Amiga Action's Street Fighter II verdict springs to mind. Funny how that name crops up so often when talk turns to shoddy journalism isn't it.

This was bestowed with an 'Amiga Action Accolade' and a score of 90%, though that's just the start (if you're in the habit of reading reviews backwards that is). The screenshots showcased were actually captured from the 256 colour VGA DOS version and

bear little resemblance to the diluted palette we received on the Amiga.

"Every fighter is magnificently animated and, when you consider the size and quality of each of the sprites, I think you'll appreciate the amount of work ploughed into producing the most attractive beat 'em up ever".

Truth be told, many frames of animation from the arcade original had to be dropped to maintain reasonable frame rates on the Amiga, leaving the characters looking far from liquid-gold smooth. The static screenshots, however, *did* look impressive at the time.

"Believe the hype. The backgrounds are almost as detailed as they are in both the arcade original or the Super Nintendo version".

Hmm, the scope of the word 'almost' has been stretched pretty thinly here, and the backgrounds are barely animated throughout.

In summary, Brad Burton exclaims, "amazing but true that not one corner has been cut in producing what is destined to become an overnight hit and will no doubt become the Christmas number one".

If you don't count as 'corners' the inescapable fact that by necessity this 6 button game had to be condensed to one lumbered with the controls of a single button joystick, or that 5 special moves had to be hacked down to 2 for each combatant, and the colours having been whittling back to a modest palette of 32, then yes, it's identical to Capcom's coin-op original!

He crows that "Street Fighter II is four disks squeezed to the brim with blood-spilling graphics and bone-crunching sound", yet somehow fails to concede that you have to swap between them incessantly, seemingly at random, and that only two disk drives are supported to relieve the pain.

***We rudely interrupt this broadcast to
bring you the latest headlines from
Pinocchio Times...***

Streetfighter II saved my marriage!

My legs grew back thanks to Blanka!

Ryu eradicated world hunger!

E.Honda sticks religiously to the Slimmer's World plan!

Chun Li paid off my mortgage!



CU Amiga were far more measured in their appraisal, yet still awarded SFII a 'Screenstar' and a 90% overall rating. Their ultimate review of dubious impartiality was reserved for Frontier: Elite II, for which a nigh-on flawless 97% standing ovation was

conferred, despite the numerous inherent bugs that plagued the release.

If you'd never clapped eyes on the arcade granddaddy of the genre, or excellent SNES port, then SFII Amiga-style is a commendable beat 'em up that resolutely stood up to the competition already available on the platform at the time.

In line with Creative Materials' other just about above-average work, it's not an awful game, just not one worthy of such lavish, unbridled praise. As a casual beat 'em up dilettante I recall getting a kick out of it in human versus human mode the Christmas I received it as a gift from my parents. It's age and cynicism that have since muddied the waters.

Would it be flogging a dead cyborg to mention Amiga Action's suspect Rise of the Robots review? In December 1994 they paid homage with a ludicrous 92% commendation. No doubt another game they assessed based on the screenshots alone, as they tucked into a complimentary tchotchke from Mirage.